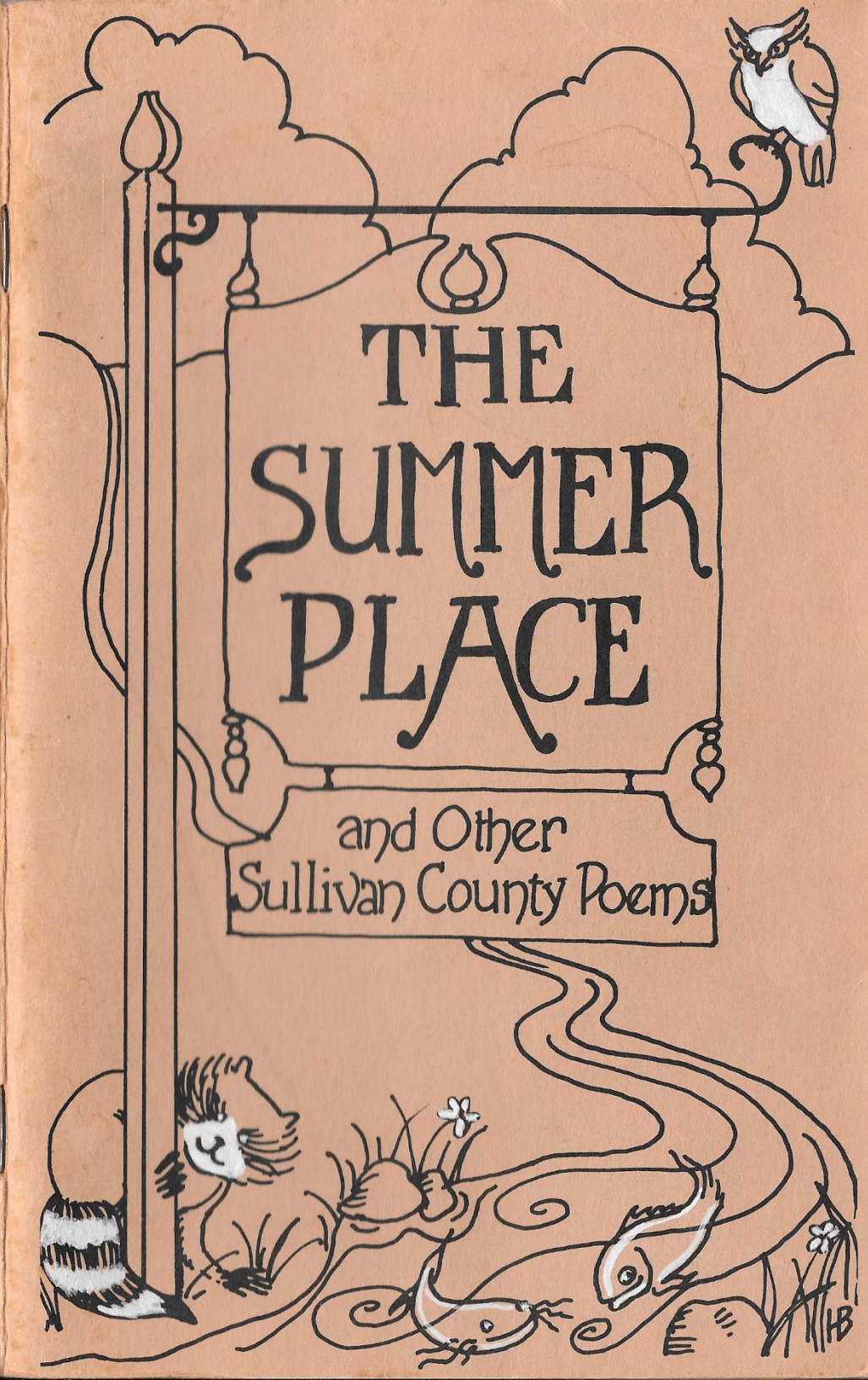
THE
SUMMER
PLACE
and Other
Sullivan County Poems
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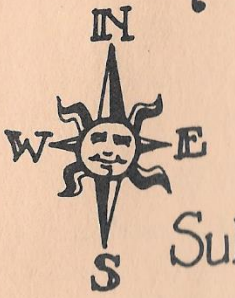
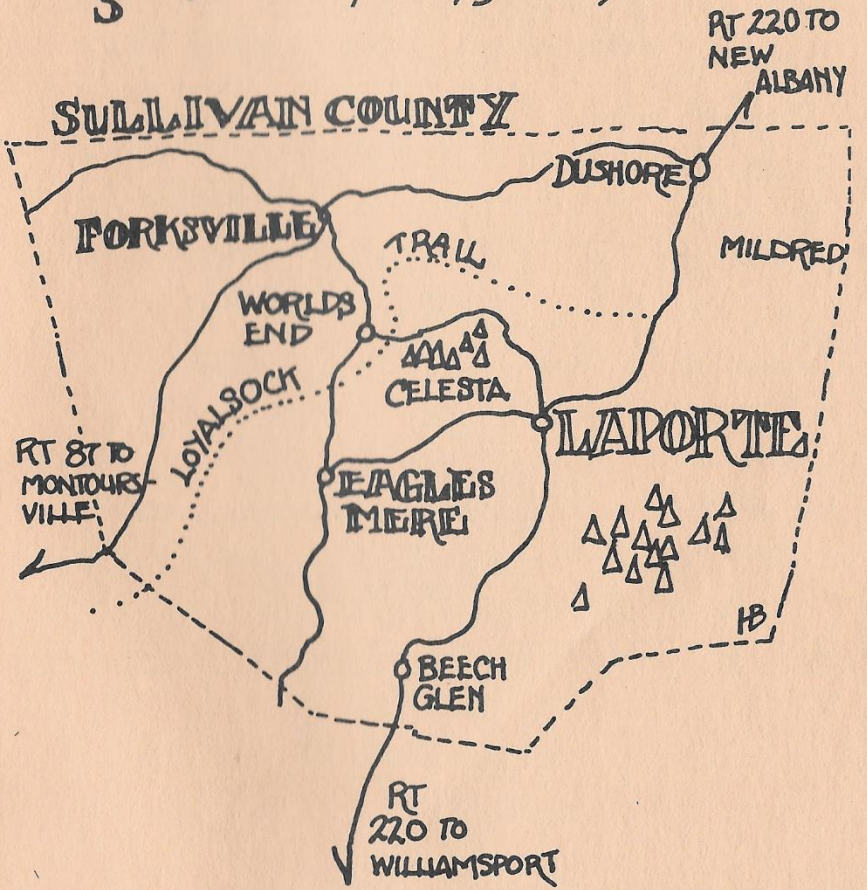
THE SUMMER PLACE

and Other Sullivan County Poems





A Note to the Reader

If I could choose a reader for this collection, I would choose a child who can, when the occasion calls for it, think like an adult. Children naturally understand what poetic and artistic license are all about. You could easily persuade them that it's all right to post a nonexistent KEEP Off sign behind somebody's beach chairs, give somebody else's cottage to the neighbors, and spread the rumor that over there at the other resort they vacuum the sand every day. Children realize that when fantasy is more interesting than fact, fact must sometimes bow away.

So "children," then. May there be a great many in the audience.

CONTENTS

Note to the Reader ii
Contents iii
THE SUMMER PLACE (I) 1
NEW LIFEGUARD 2
THE ASSOCIATION LAYS DOWN THE LAW 3
GOING TO THE LAKE IN THE '30's 4
BETWEEN SONESTOWN + LAPORTE, TODAY COUNTRY AUCTION 5
OWNERSHIP 6
AT THE OTHER RESORT 7
NATURE HIKE 8
TO THE YOUNG VIOLINIST WHO LOST HER PLACE 9
FISHING LESSON 10
HOLE IN THE 'SOCK 11
TIMID CYCLIST 12
THEATER IN THE PARK 13
BUMPING DOWN THE LOYALSOCK
REFLECTIONS BULLDOZER 14
THE CANDY HOUSE 15
CELESTA, 1853 16
CELESTA TODAY 17

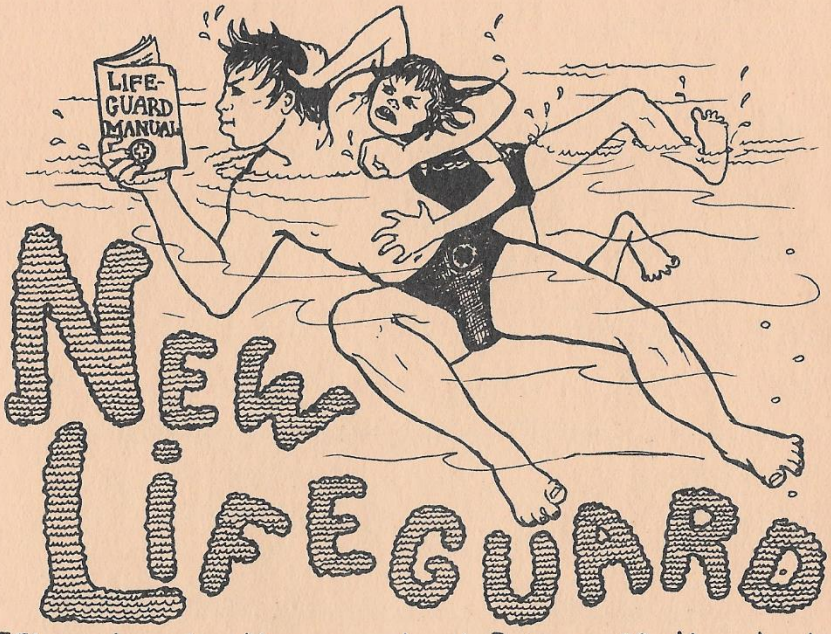
THE DAY AMERICA FELL APART... 18
THE $7.00 SUNDAE 20
THE ABBY SPECIAL 21
THE TAMING OF A WILDERNESS AREA 22
THERE IS A HOUSE DIVIDED... 23
MAN WITH A TALL LADDER 24
FATHER JOE
SUNDAY NIGHT MOVIE AT 25
THE EAGLES MERE COMMUNITY HALL
A RACCOON POEM FOR CHILDREN 26
MEETING THE INNOCENT ALONG THE WAY 28
EARLY MORNING FOG 29
PROSPECT STREET 30
CRESTMONT AUCTION 31
THE SUMMER PLACE (II) 33
END OF THE SEASON 34
A BEAR POEM FOR CHILDREN 35
LATE FALL SUNDAY 36
THE LAKE IN WINTER 37
FOUNTAIN AVENUE AFTER A FREEZING RAIN
HOW TO SPOT SNOW OWLS 38
A CAT POEM FOR CHILDREN 39
ON VIEWING STILL ANOTHER SNOWFALL.. 40
ALONG THE LOYALSOCK TRAIL 41

The Summer Place (Part I)

Each year they find it silent and withdrawn.
It barely answers when they say, "Hello!
How are you? Did you have a nice winter?
Was there much snow?"

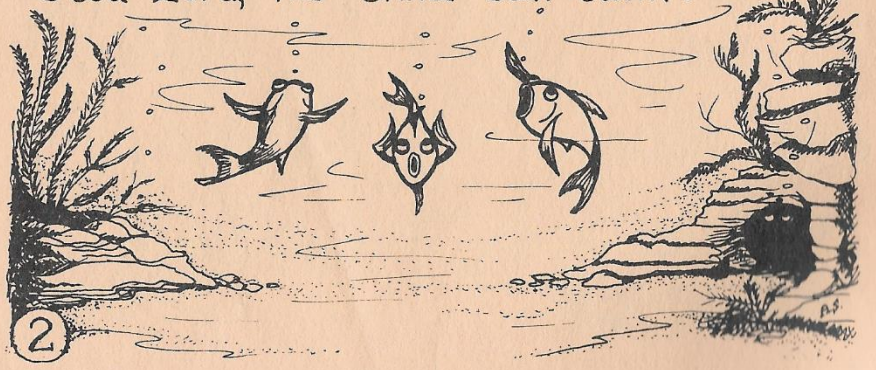
Ill at ease,
they huddle around a trespasser's fire,
wondering how better to introduce themselves.
Even the cat feels unsure about what,
if anything, it is supposed to claw.

But gradually the summer place begins to thaw.
Shyly it starts pointing out treasures
and secret places.
Shyly it beckons the cat
to the shredded sofa arm. Everyone
relaxes. The rooms grow warm
with plans and laughter.
Summer is born . . .



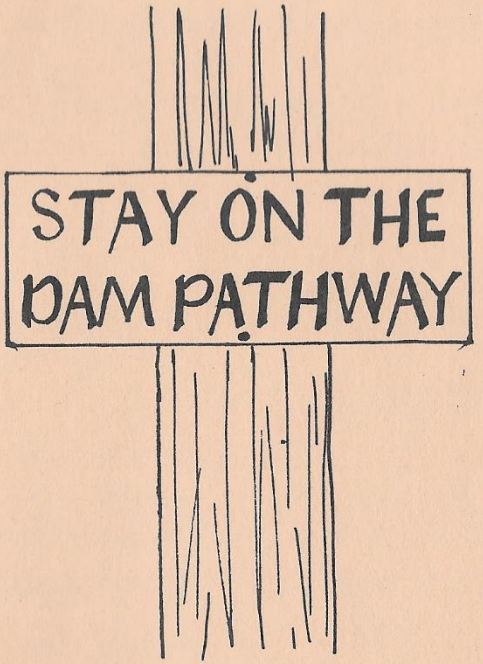
NEW LIFEGUARD

When her brother pushed Lisa off the dock
I was in like a flash
putting it all into practice: left hand
disengaging her arm from around my neck,
right hand cupping her chin,
just like we learned in class.
Hauled her struggling to the dock.
(got a welt on my shin).
Carried her up the ramp, passing her brother
on the way; frowned furiously at him.
Handed her to her mother
playing Gin in the grass, who said,
"Good Lord, the child can swim!"



The Association Lays Down The Law

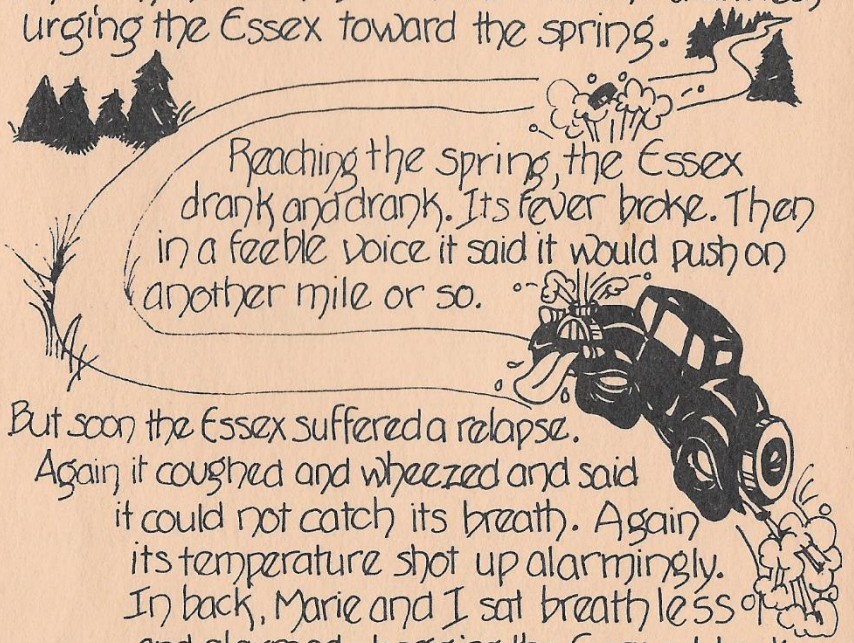
At the end of the lake, a dam.
On top of the dam, a path.
Beside the path, a sign:



What was the Association's state of mind
when it commissioned this sign?

GOING TO THE LAKE IN THE '30's

When I was ten and my cousin five, my parents
sometimes took us to the lake. Only the Essex
didn't like to go. Climbing the mountain,
it complained of breathlessness. It coughed
and wheezed. Its temperature shot up alarmingly.
In back, Marie and I sat breathless and alarmed,
urging the Essex toward the spring.



Reaching the spring, the Essex
drank and drank. Its fever broke. Then
in a feeble voice it said it would push on
another mile or so.

But soon the Essex suffered a relapse.
Again it coughed and wheezed and said
it could not catch its breath. Again
its temperature shot up alarmingly.
In back, Marie and I sat breathless
and alarmed, begging the Essex not to die
until it reached the lake.

I remember pushing the Essex up that hill.
But what we did when we reached the top
is a book now firmly closed.

BETWEEN SONESTOWN AND LAPORTE, TODAY

Those who come this way often
find the mountains ever changing,
ever shifting color,
ever different,
always new.

All that stays the same
is the unmarked car by the roadside,
trying to look like a tourist
who has stopped to admire the view.

ON ATTENDING ONE'S FIRST COUNTRY AUCTION

"You really should go," they said,
"just for the show. People come
from miles around and you'll be amazed
at the things they buy."

I went. A most unusual event
for one who's city bred.
And I *was* amazed, just as they said
I'd be when, raising my hand to swat
a fly, I found I'd bought
a chamber pot.

Ownership

Squeezed between road and lake,
a smudge of land and three beach chairs.
Behind the chairs, a stern custodial sign:
KEEP OFF.

Does no one visit the beach chairs
and serve them tea? Always I find them
quite alone, staring at the lake.
Unmowed, the grass curls up
around their feet.

Who owns this silent land?
Who owns these chairs? Could it be
they think I do, whizzing by
on my bicycle, calling out,
"Have a nice day!"

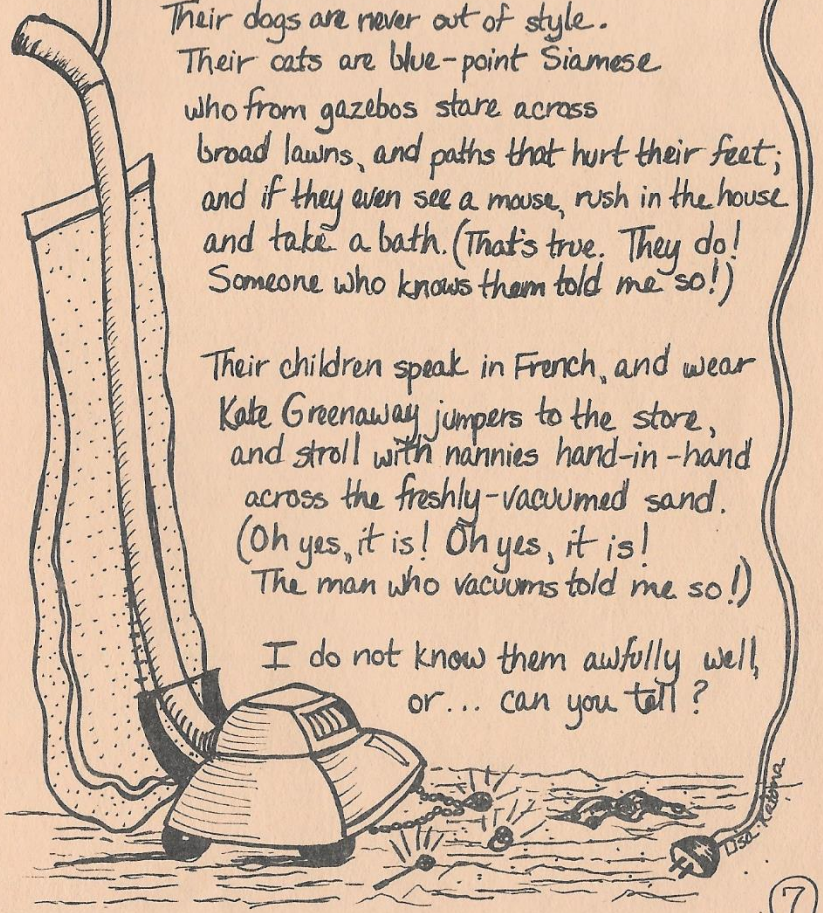
AT THE OTHER RESORT

People wear sable to the beach
and all their lifeguards went to Yale.
They eat fresh lobster flown first-class
from Rockport, Maine, and say, "Please pass
for this Peach Melba under glass,
the fresh-whipped cream." (And not just Sundays-
every day. Someone who works there told me so.)

Their dogs are never out of style.
Their cats are blue-point Siamese
who from gazebos stare across
broad lawns, and paths that hurt their feet;
and if they even see a mouse, rush in the house
and take a bath. (That's true. They do!
Someone who knows them told me so!)

Their children speak in French, and wear
Kate Greenaway jumpers to the store,
and stroll with nannies hand-in-hand
across the freshly-vacuumed sand.
(Oh yes, it is! Oh yes, it is!
The man who vacuums told me so!)

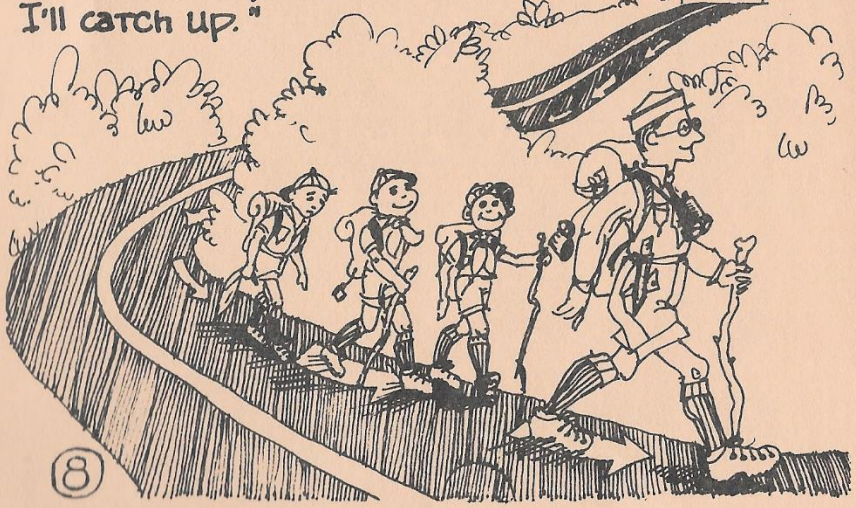
I do not know them awfully well,
or... can you tell?



NATURE HIKE

Firm WHITE ARROWS
leading through forests,
in and out of quarries, over makeshift dams;
up hills, up hills, and up hills,
ending at last at a great WHITE 1

WHERE THERE WILL BE
ICED POP, COOKIES, AND a BATHROOM. And where,
too soon, an abominable scout master
WILL GLANCE at his WATCH, SLAP his KNEES
and say, "OKAY, GANG! Let's go!"
And WHERE, OFF IN a CORNER, WANTING more
COOKIES BUT AFRAID to ASK, LEGS a CRISS-CROSS
of BRAMBLE SCRATCHES, STILL DAMP
from FALLING IN at the dam,
a SMALL LOST SCOUT IS MUMBLING
"Aw, you guys go on WITHOUT me, WHY DONCHA?
I'll CATCH UP."



TO THE YOUNG VIOLINIST WHO LOST HER PLACE

As we applauded, you smiled,
uncertainly, as if to say,
You needn't clap for me tonight.
I know I didn't do it right.

Oh, but you did!
You did. You did.
You were the one who passed the test
not even given to the rest.
You were the one who, though she fell,
got up again, and finished well.

While I --I sat thinking of children
everywhere who, having fallen, stay
where they fall, or creep away
when they fall; who learning only failure
never try again.

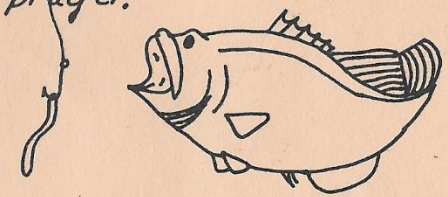
FISHING LESSON

In a rowboat anchored close to shore
a father teaches his son to fish.

The little boy
sits first-time-fishing straight,
watching his cork expectantly.
He grips the pole against the pull
of that great bass which, very soon,
will cleave the cove and seize his bait.

I watch this scene uneasily.
Memories of certainties which fell apart
malign its innocence. Whose thought
is this, "Please send a fish.
Even a puny unimportant fish will do"--
this father's thought, or mine?

No matter.
All of us murder children's faith.
All of us beg protection for the pure
and call it prayer.



Hole in the Sock

And someone changed her suit in the car
behind the frayed bath towel which fell down
just as somebody else passed by,
but he didn't say anything
being too fat for his own suit anyhow.

And many turned up in unconventional-type swimtogs
and floated out over their heads on buoyant devices
consuming sandwiches beyond a certain point,
but nobody seemed to mind.

Several shampooed,
and someone brought a dog who went in and came out
and shook all over everyone including sandwiches
but no one reported it, though quite a few
had words with the dog

No, nobody reported it
nobody breathed a word
because in a world
of almost no place left
THIS was a place.

The Timid Cyclist

For one who has known mostly cats
and goldfish, these roads are unsettling.
On this road lives a collie who goes berserk
each time he sees me sneaking by.
Round and round his yard he dashes,
hurling ultimatums and shouting out warnings.
If he should forget where his yard ends,
we won't even be this close friends.

Down that road lives a St. Bernard
who rattles his dog house at me
in a threatening way each time I pass.
I know he is inching that dog house
toward the street, just so
the two of us can someday meet.

Farther on
there are dachshunds, setters and poodles
whose "Most Wanted" list I head.
There's even a three-inch chihuahua
who plainly wishes me dead.

Every day it's the same:
I pause at the foot of my drive
asking myself in which direction
to be brave.

THEATER IN THE PARK

I didn't see it.
I only know what they say.
Under that tent, a local actor
got so carried away
by the possibilities of playing Snoopy
that he turned into a dog.

BUMPING DOWN the LOYALSOCK

Seeking adventure, Elsa and I
dove into the Loyalsock
and headed downstream.
Floated, swam, waded, drifted.
Got slammed, pitched, whirled and flung.
Staggered out, finally, at the bend,
feeling akin to all who underestimate
the odds, but make it even so.

Reflections

On quiet mornings the lake relaxes,
letting land and sky tell it what to think.

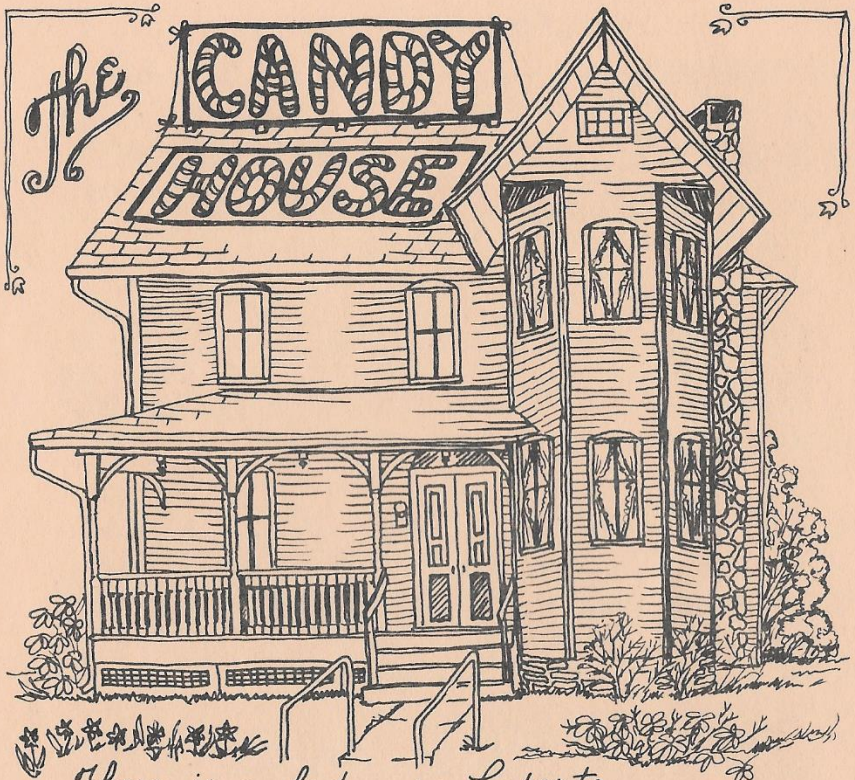
Only the fish are original.
They rise to the surface
carrying sets of circles in their mouths,
releasing one set, going down for the next.

Set free, the circles uncoil and head
for shore, shattering the lake's illusion,
rudely plowing through its trance.

BULLDOZER

There is a whisper in this grove.
The word has come
that those who claim the land
are on the march again.

Listen.
Can you hear the whisper?
The trees are bidding the earth
goodbye.



There is a lady in Laporte
who used to make the most wonderful
chocolates. You could go to her house
and say, "I'll take a pound of
this and that,
this and that,
some of these,
and 2 or 3 or 4 of those."

At 80, though, she gave up chocolates.
Gave up creams and caramels,
fruits and fudges,
nuts and nougets,
mints and brittles,
keeping only marshmallows.

"Too much work," she said,
"Left me no time for golf."

Celesta, 1853

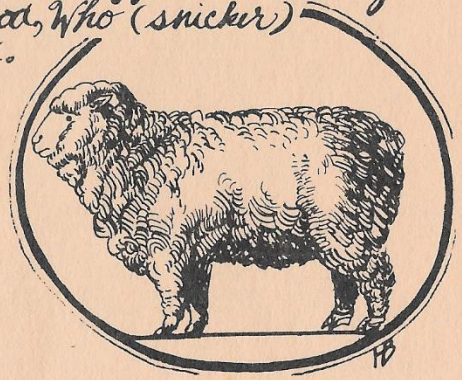
Reading in the Bible that the earth belongs
to God, Peter Armstrong deeded to his Maker
600 acres of Pennsylvania sod, and set out
to build thereon a holy city where men
would live in peace with their neighbors,
owning all things in common,
owing no man.

Came Tax time. Up the hill
puffed the tax collector waving a most unholy
bill, which Peter — having deeded his land away —
steadfastly refused to pay.

Back to Laporte went the tax man,
returned with an order from the court.
It read: "Impound the Celestian sheep." Peter
frowned. Impound God's sheep? Impossible!
Quickly he gathered his people together
to watch the court's defeat.

Knowing sheep better than God, the tax man
called out, "This way please," to the sheep,
who, renegades all, minced through the gate
and down the hill, letting themselves be sold
to foot the bill.

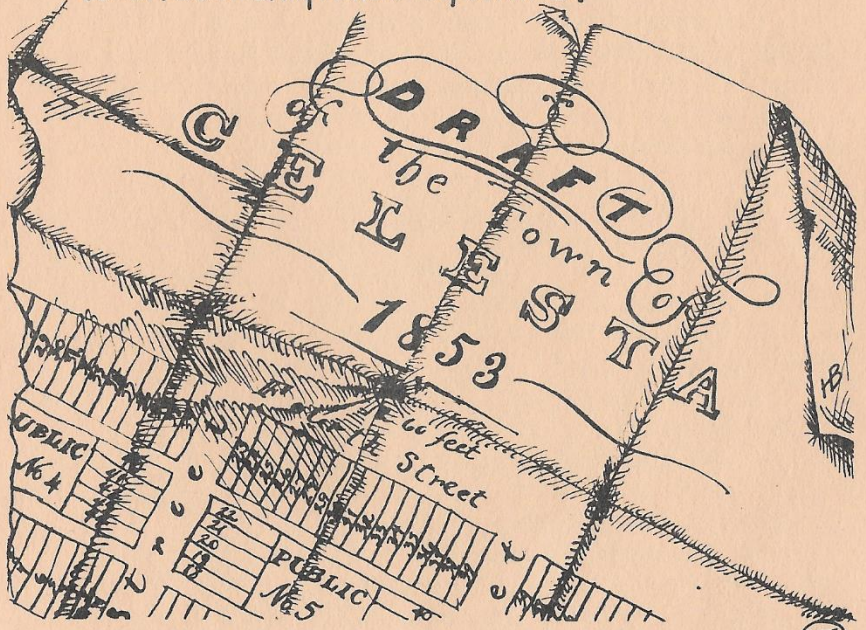
Celesta went downhill after them. Today
it's dead, long dead.
Yet local folks still remember. Local folks
still make cracks about crazy Peter Armstrong
willing his land to God, Who (snicker)
wouldn't pay the tax.



Celesta Today

Descendants of early apple trees
stray up and down the hillside.
Beneath their branches
the flattened grass tattles of deer
who like to breakfast in bed.
Blueberry bushes peep around corners.
If you rush after one, though, you may
fall into someone's cellar, now a crumble
of rock and ragged brick.

Who once built on <u>this</u> site?
Peter? Or a turncoat brother, creeping away
when the sheep left town?
Where was the Zion Press, mouthpiece
for Peter's millenial views?
The trading post? The watering trough?
The meeting hall?
The church?
And where was Peter standing
when suddenly felled by stroke?



Postmistress
Laporte, PA 18626

Dear Madam:

On July 14 our inspector visited your office. He arrived by bicycle, carrying a fishing pole, a copy of the Sullivan Review, and a beach towel shaped like a raccoon. At the window he asked for the General Delivery mail of one John Doe. He was attired in pre-washed jeans, canvas knockabouts, and a sweat shirt with a deer, a bear, a bass, a pheasant, a mountain laurel and two sailboats on the front, and the words, "HELLO, LAKE MOKO!" on the back.

(In order to keep our manual--"How to Mingle Unnoticed with the Summer Folk in Small Mountain Resort Towns"--up to date, we would like to know if he stood out in any way. Please direct your comments to my personal attention.)

According to his report, you are in violation on several points. Namely:

1. There is a lending library on the premises.
2. Someone has placed miniature vases of flowers within two (2) feet of the stamp window.
3. You are keeping a jar of lollypops for children hidden under the counter.
4. On the lobby desk there is a notice reading: "Lost, calico cat with double paws. Family pet. Children heartbroken. Please call 946-6666."
5. You were overheard asking a postal patron if she had found the above-mentioned family pet yet and telling her about a certain Tisher or Teisher who returned intact after an unexplained absence of three (3) months.

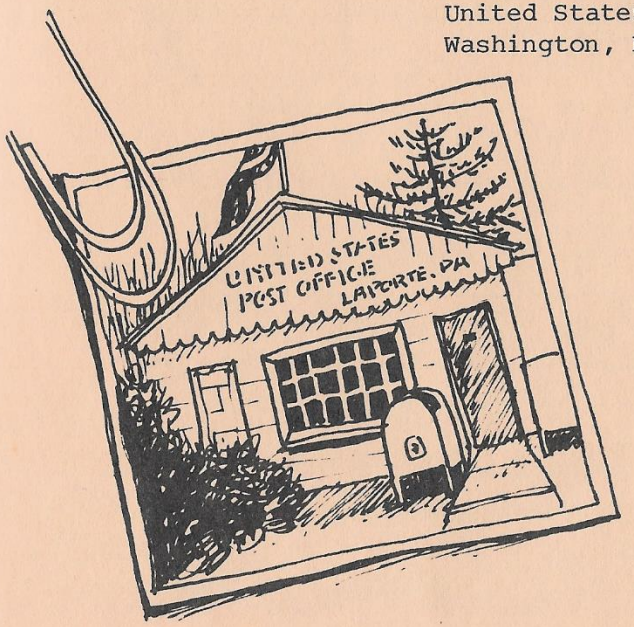
In regard to Item 5 above, we are not suggesting that all personal communication between postal employees and patrons should cease. We do, however, insist that it be confined to more appropriate topics. The following have met with enthusiastic response in post offices across the country:

1. How to adjust to life in the Army, Navy, Air Corps, and Marines.
2. How to overpower and subdue Most-Wanted Criminals.
3. Why the Internal Revenue Service is everyone's best friend.

If when he next returns to your office our inspector finds you still in violation, it may be necessary to bring in a New York City postmistress to show you how to do things.

Yours Truly,

M.S. Cheevus
Chief Inspector
United States Post Office
Washington, DC 20000



THE $7.00 SUNDAE

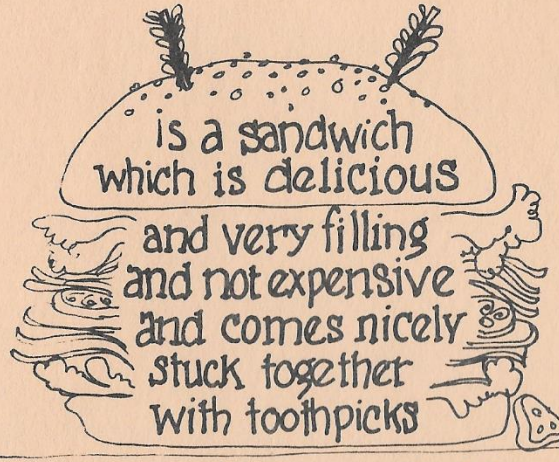
at the Sweet Shoppe consists of

twenty dips
of icecream smothered
in etcetera etcetera etcetera
with six maraschino cherries on top.

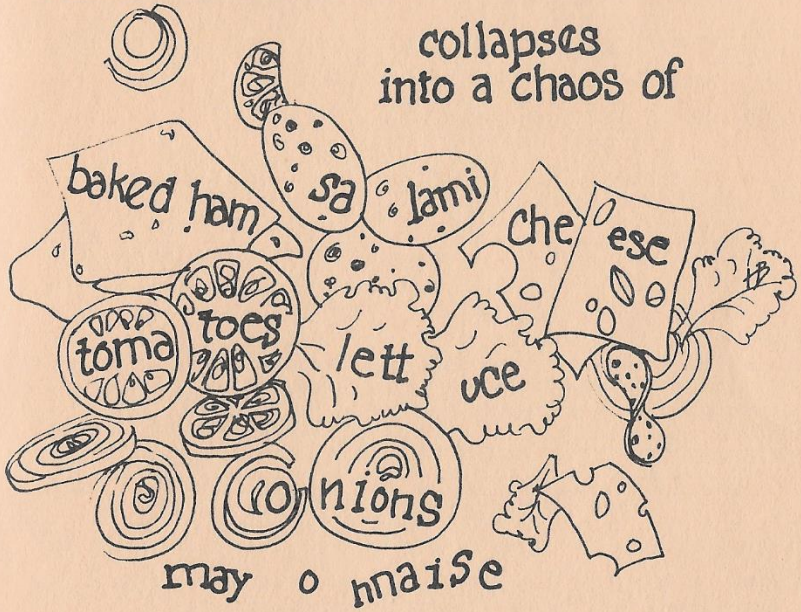
Picture this scene:
They are on their honeymoon.
She is shy and retiring.
He is bold and protective.
He orders the Tin Roof (fudge sauce
and peanuts on three dips of vanilla).
She orders the seven dollar special.

Can this marriage be saved?

THE ABBY SPECIAL



but which, when you start to eat it,

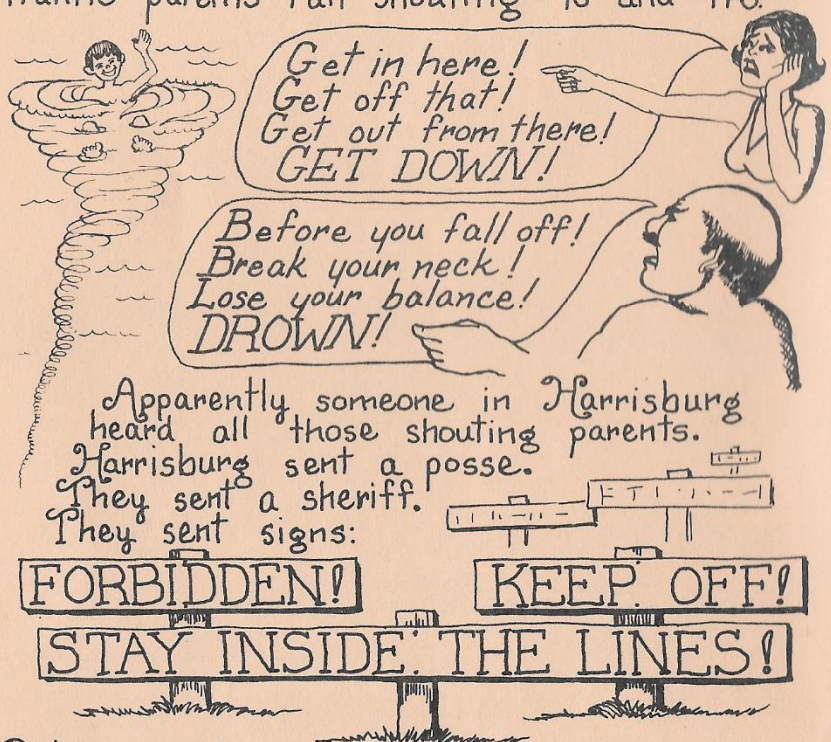


and which, if you're thinking of ordering it
when someone you want to impress is around
I say forget it,
because you'll regret it.

The Taming of a Wilderness Area

When I was a child I knew a place
quite free and wild.
There were cliffs to climb.
A whirlpool. A spillway. And every child
(including me) was always in over his head
whether he could swim or not.

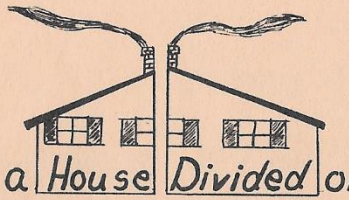
Along the edge,
frantic parents ran shouting to and fro.



Apparently someone in Harrisburg
heard all those shouting parents.
Harrisburg sent a posse.
They sent a sheriff.
They sent signs:

Relax, parents. Go back to your sunbaths.
Law and order have been established.
World's End has been captured
and put behind bars.

(I'm rather glad I was a child
back when World's End was free and wild.)



There Is a House Divided on This Road

The year they bought this house
he said, "Let's call the place Split Rock."
She answered, "No, Big Hemlock
is a better name."
That ended that, for then.

Next summer,
he: "Soon time to move up to Split Rock."
And she: "Where's that?"
"Where's what? Split Rock -- our cottage
at the lake!"
"You mean Big Hemlock! Be precise
for goodness sake!"
Again, that ended that, for then.

Next summer,
he put up a sign. She did the same.
Carpenters came. Partitioned the place
right down the middle, added
a second everything --
which <u>really</u> ended that, for then.

This summer, though,
meeting in town, they've begun to speak:
"Well, Mary Ellen Brown from Hemrock!
How do you do!"
"Well, William Brown from Big Lock!
Just fine -- and you?"

Now they're driving each other home,
not living far apart.
Everyone's whispering about it,
knowing how love affairs start.

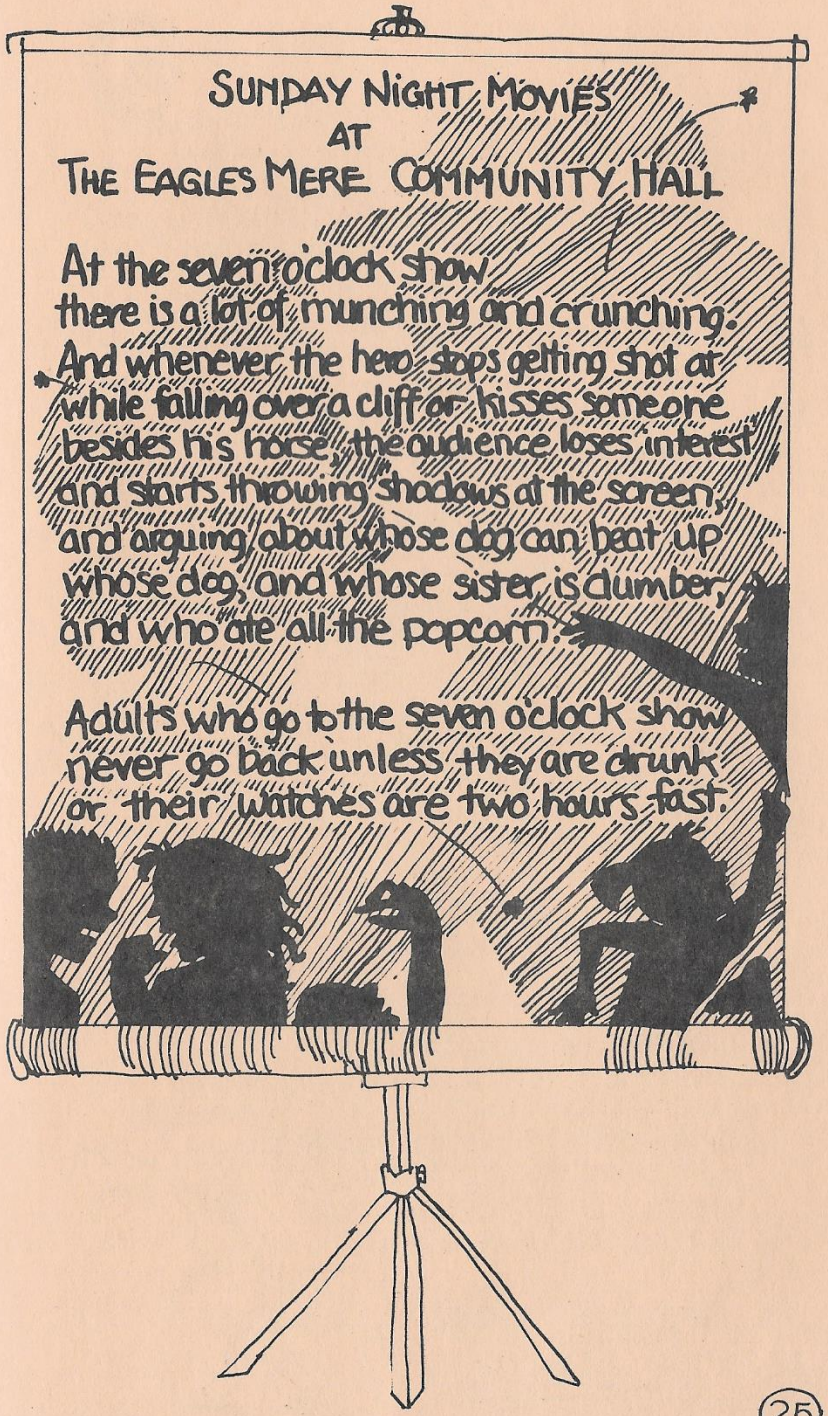
Man with a Tall Ladder

What needs doing, this man's willing ---
pipes resoldered,
driveways graveled,
dead trees sawed
into logs for fires.

Here's a man
you can trust your keys to.
High on the list
when blessings get counted.
Someone the town would miss.

Father Joe

Have you heard about Father Joe?
He's the one who
when people were slow
to settle down and the acolytes
couldn't get the candles lit,
said,
"Let's get this show on the road!"
thereby doing his bit
to put the Mass
into the language of the land.



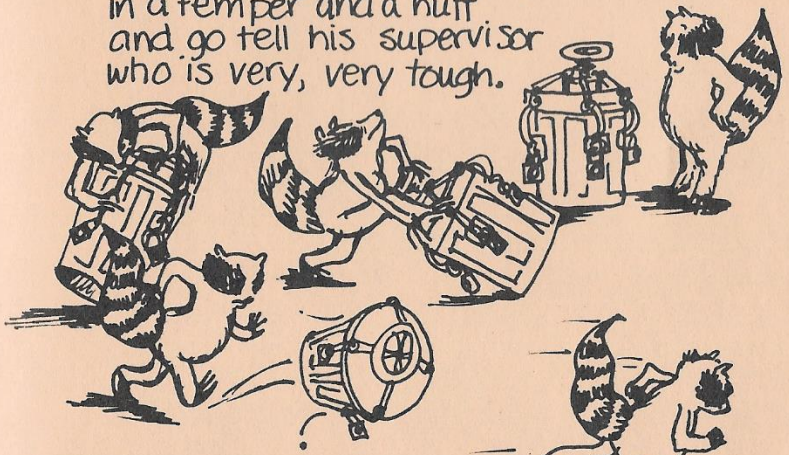
A RACCOON POEM FOR CHILDREN

At the start of each new season
for some rather puzzling reason
all the Endless Mountain 'coons,
round and fat as striped balloons,
are assigned a place for snacking
when their food supply is lacking.

Now if late some summer night
after you've turned out the light,
you should hear a bumping-thumping
and a sound of trash-can-dumping
it is probably <u>your</u> raccoon
romping out there in the moon,
chomping scraps of toast and cherries,
cottage cheese and fresh strawberries,
and discarding in a hurry
everything that's spiced with curry;
throwing, strewing, stamping, flattening
all he finds that isn't fattening,
such as tags and cat food tins,
used teabags and onion skins.

Now suppose some guest for supper
who is not a cleaner-upper
one night finds his old can vanished
(to the trash dump it's been banished)
and instead finds one designed
with a messy 'coon in mind.
He can smell the sauerkraut,
but he cannot get it out!

Well, he'll whack that can and smack it
and he'll wrestle it around.
He will wham it and he'll slam it,
and then slap it to the ground,
getting madder by the minute
'cause he wants to get what's in it.
Then he'll leave that 'coon-proof cottage
in a temper and a huff
and go tell his supervisor
who is very, very tough.



At the start of next year's season
for some not-so-puzzling reason
when <u>those</u> people hear a thumping
and a sound of trash-can-dumping,
late some moonlit summer night
after they've turned out the light,
it's quite likely they will find
that a BEAR has been assigned.

Meeting the Innocent Along the Way

Walking to town
I pass a mother and her child.
The mother smiles. I smile. She says,
"Good morning!" I reply, "Hello!"
We know it's quite all right
to speak to strangers
at the lake.

The little girl
leans after me. Her mouth sounds out
a silent Hi. Her eyes are stars.
Her waving hand's a fettered bird
struggling to free itself
and fly to me.

Up to the bend
I'm walking backward, waving Hi
to someone walking backward, waving Hi
who hasn't learned we speak to strangers
only at the lake.

Early Morning Jog

DURING THE NIGHT SOMEBODY STOLE OUR LAKE. IT IS DISCONCERTING TO LOOK OUT AND FIND A WHOLE LAKE GONE. IF IT WERE JUST THE BEACH HOUSE OR A FEW CANOES ~ BUT EVERYTHING IS MISSING. WHAT TO DO?

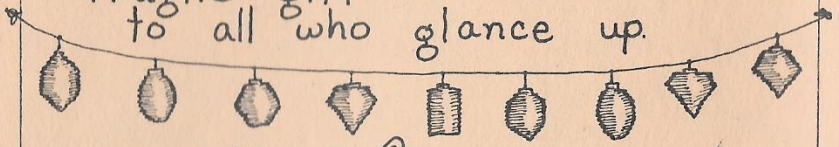
PAUL WANTS TO CALL PRUDENTIAL.
SUZIE WANTS TO CALL THE POLICE.
I FAVOR AN AD IN THE LOST & FOUND.
TIMMY INSISTS ON A STATE-WIDE SEARCH.

IT IS WHILE WE ARE ARGUING AND YELLING AT THE DOG TO **STOP THAT HOWLING!** THAT WHOEVER TOOK IT BROUGHT IT BACK! WE LOOKED OUT AGAIN AND THERE IT WAS- ISLAND AND ALL. WE WILL NEVER KNOW WHY THEY RETURNED IT. PERHAPS IN THE DARK THEY THOUGHT IT WAS EAGLES MERE.

Prospect Street ~

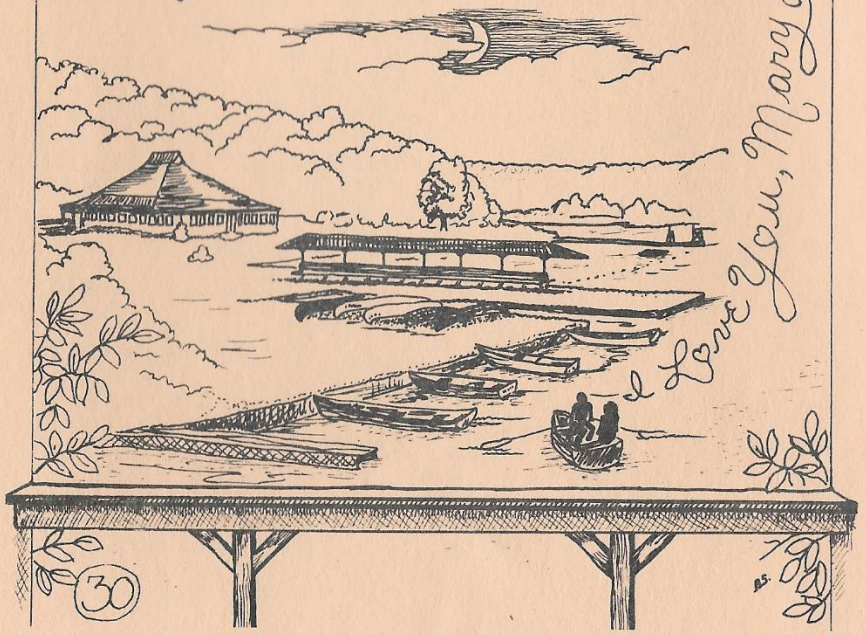
The Lanterns

Shimmering through the trees,
a necklace of lanterns,
fragile gift
to all who glance up.

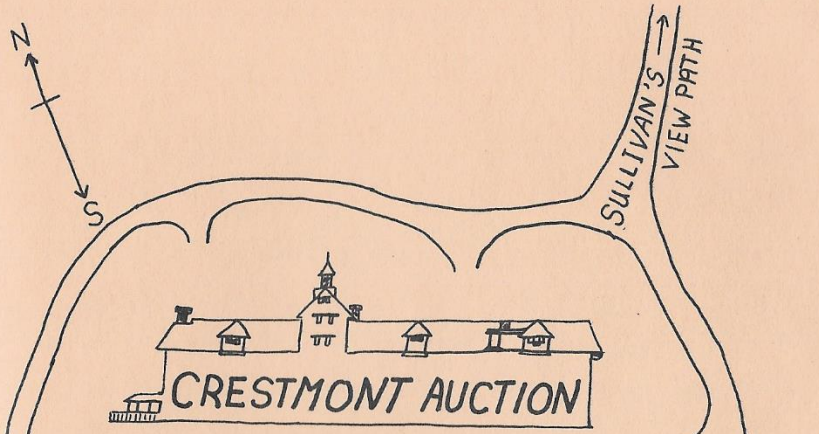


The Voices

The lake is a gossip,
especially at night.
Those on the hill
with not much to do
can sit on their porches
and find out who down there
is saying what to who.



I Love You, Mary Lou Montagues



And I watched as she turned to her father
who, perhaps never knowing why
he did, had raised his card
to bid on the last silver creamer
and found his bid was high.

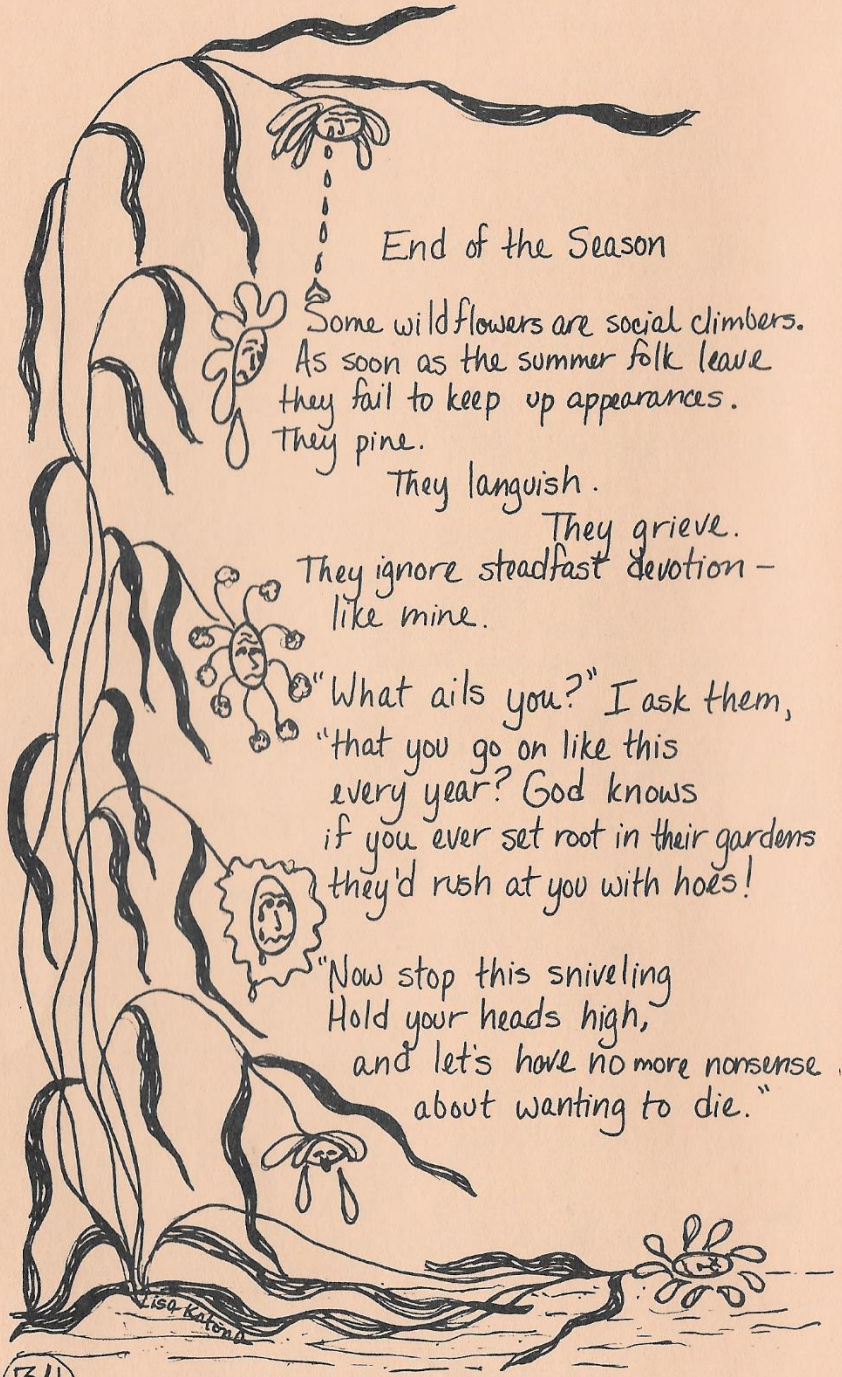
And for a moment
that one face outshone
the greed and the callous stares,
the arty stance of the auctioneers,
the shame of those who stayed away,
the littered grass, the inn stripped bare...

Outshone the wrong,
that glowing Christmas face,
casting a quiet blessing on the place.

The Summer Place (Part II)

But gradually the summer place began to thaw.
The rooms grew warm with plans and laughter.
Summer was born...

and one day died again.
What did it say, the summer place,
as the car whispered away for the last time?
"I am myself once more"?
Or - - -



End of the Season

Some wildflowers are social climbers.
As soon as the summer folk leave
they fail to keep up appearances.
They pine.
They languish.
They grieve.
They ignore steadfast devotion –
like mine.

"What ails you?" I ask them,
"that you go on like this
every year? God knows
if you ever set root in their gardens
they'd rush at you with hoes!

"Now stop this sniveling
Hold your heads high,
and let's have no more nonsense
about wanting to die."

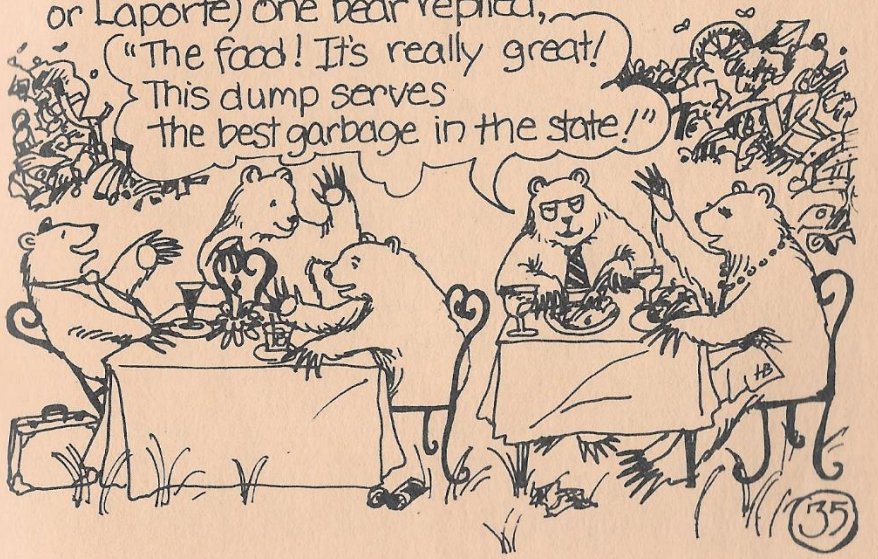
Lisa Kalona

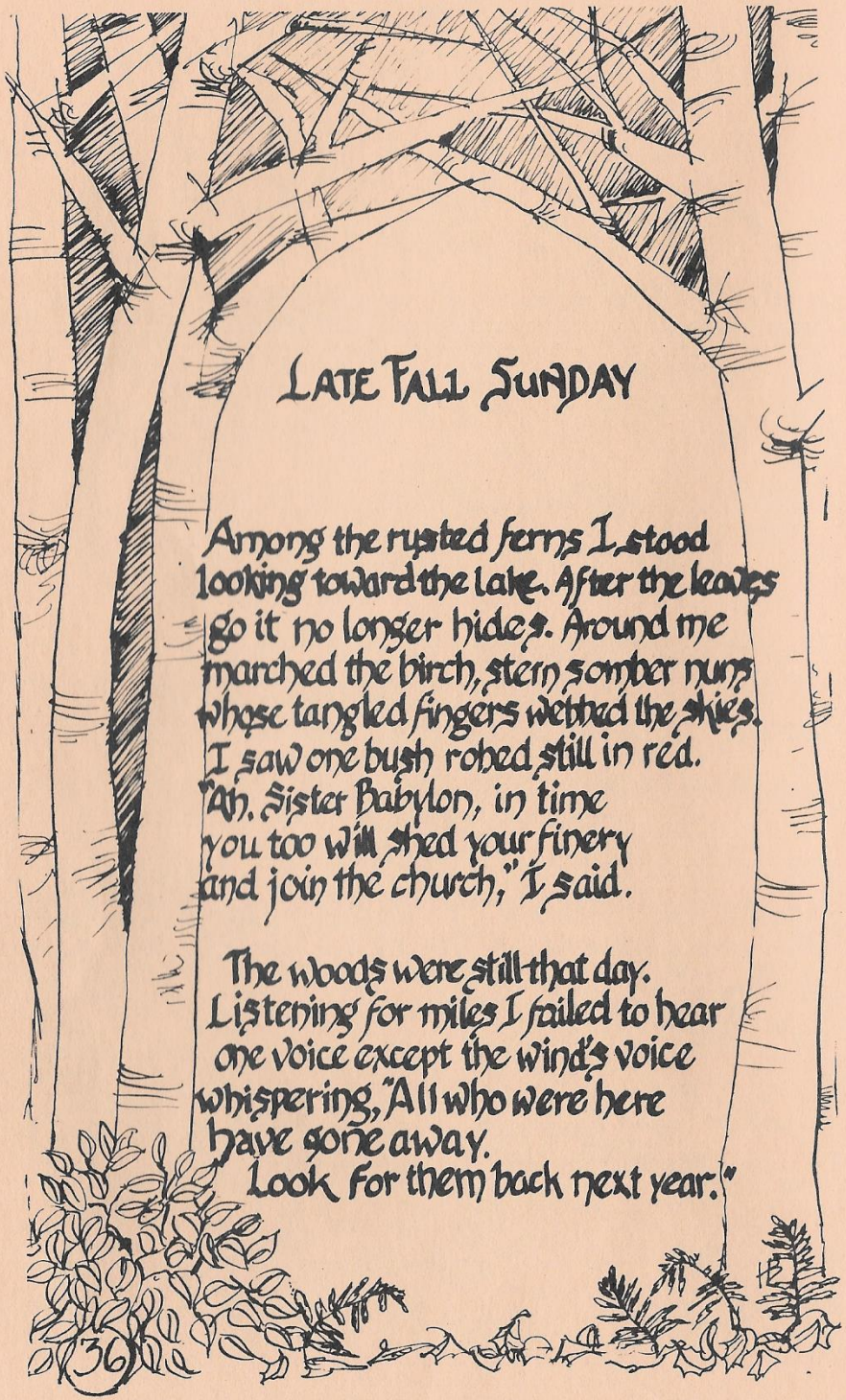
A BEAR STORY FOR CHILDREN

The Pennsylvania Bears Association (P.B.A.)
is holding its convention here this year,
in Mildred.
During the day, the bears
discuss important topics like,
"Surviving Hibernation Happily" and
Ridding the Woods of Hunters Rapidly"

When evening falls, they gather
at the town's main restaurant for bears,
where they relax and chat with friends.

Asked why they chose this town
for their convention (rather than Pittsburgh
or Laporte) one bear replied,





Late Fall Sunday

Among the rusted ferns I stood
looking toward the lake. After the leaves
go it no longer hides. Around me
marched the birch, stern somber nuns
whose tangled fingers wetted the skies.
I saw one bush robed still in red.
"Ah, Sister Babylon, in time
you too will shed your finery
and join the church," I said.

The woods were still that day.
Listening for miles I failed to hear
one voice except the wind's voice
whispering, "All who were here
have gone away.
Look for them back next year."

The Lake in Winter

One who loves the summer lake,
only the summer lake,
is like a man who loves a woman
knowing only her Latin warmth.
The spare stern Puritan
he has never seen, the pioneer
woman standing steel straight
in the snow, crying out,
"This too, this too
is what I am."

Fountain Avenue
after a Freezing Rain

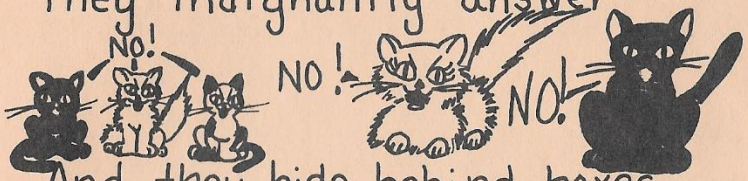
Can you breathe, trees,
crystalled in last night's rain?
Diamond and sterling
thrown upon blue steel.
Dead jade, shimmer
of moonstone, countless
sapphire, and frosted
aquamarine. Can you breathe?
Can you breathe?
Is it all right to admire you?

HOW TO SPOT SNOW OWLS

Go to the court house late at night.
Take a flashlight and a mirror,
the bigger the better within reason.
Stand in the middle of the road
with your back to the court house.
Turn on the flashlight and aim it
in the mirror so it goes over
whichever shoulder seems natural
and lands somewhere. If it doesn't
land in the belfry, move things around
some, including yourself, until it does.
There you will see the snow owls,
hooting hysterically
over all those strange acting humans
down there in the street below.

A CAT POEM FOR CHILDREN

When the cats are told
to go play in the snow
they indignantly answer

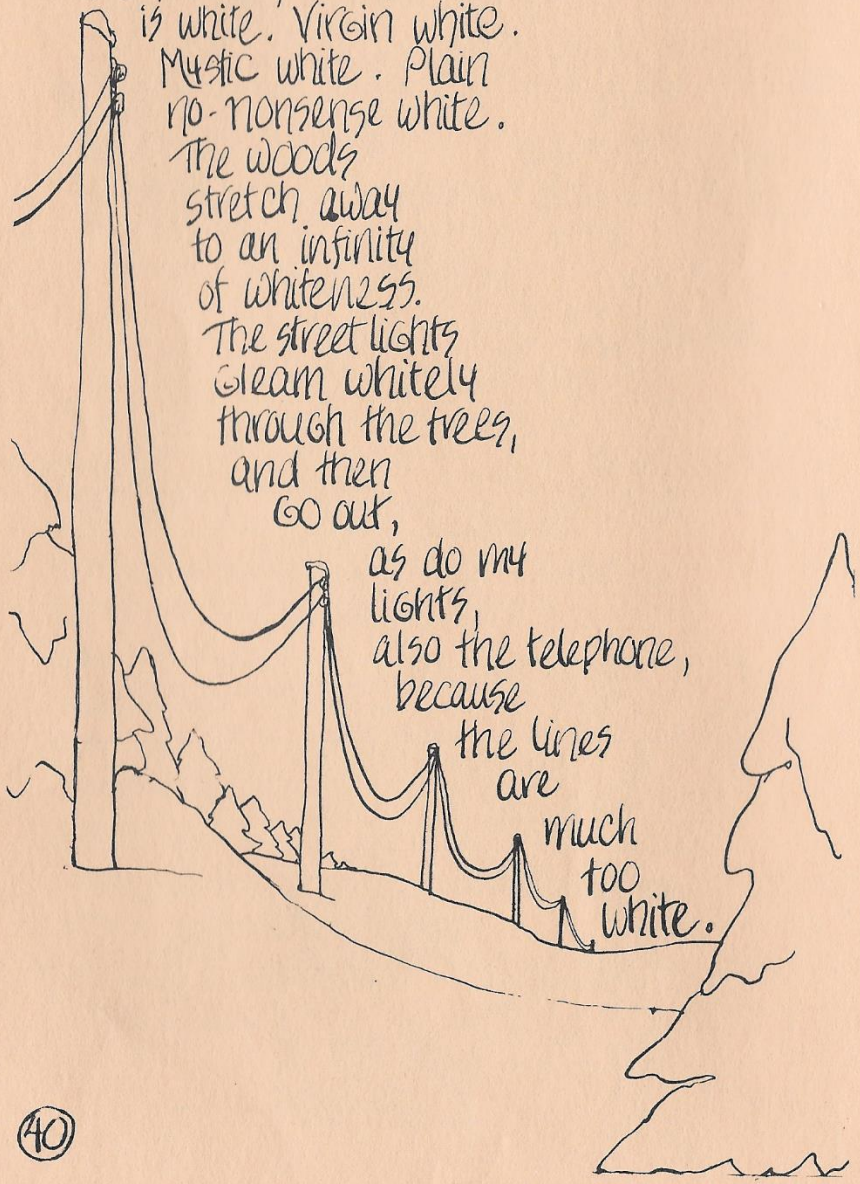


And they hide behind boxes
in the bedroom closet
saying,
"Here we stay
till the snow goes away!"
Saying,
"We stay HERE
till the ground is clear!"

But nevertheless
they usually appear
at the sound of fish
being spooned in their dish.

ON VIEWING STILL ANOTHER SNOWFALL FROM A COTTAGE IN THE WOODS

White, white, everything
is white. Virgin white.
Mystic white. Plain
no-nonsense white.
The woods
stretch away
to an infinity
of whiteness.
The street lights
gleam whitely
through the trees,
and then
Go out,
as do my
lights,
also the telephone,
because
the lines
are
much
too
white.

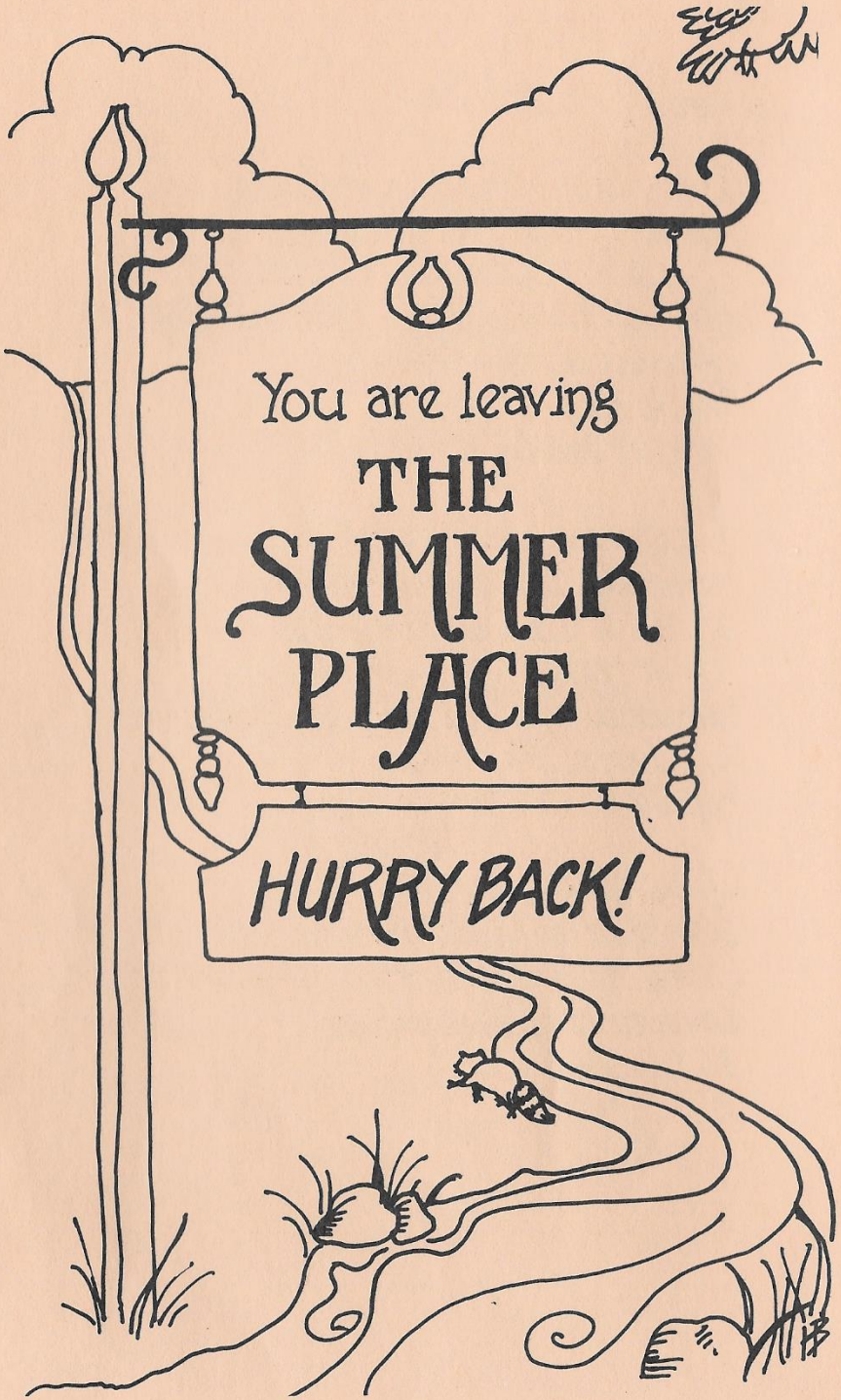


Along the Loyalsock Trail

If you follow this path in March
you will come to a waterfall.
Observe the plunge of crystal
through the ice, the patterned frost
sprayed on the rocks.
Try to fathom the pool
ringed still by sprad.

Continue on down the hill
until you come to the Loyalsock
smashing its way to the sea.
This is not last summer's stream,
tamed by the heat, tolerant of swimmers
and debris. This stream
knows no will but its own.

Climb back up the hill.
Glance at the No Trespassing sign
by the road. Marvel that any man
believes in keeping beauty
to himself.



VERSE

Frances M. Greene

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